

Child Welfare System

Report highlights

February 2017

Gaps in placement services, program capacity, organizational culture, and system-level oversight prevent the state's child welfare system from performing at the high level of expectation set through policy making and program design processes.

Findings

A worsening shortage (8% decrease between 2014 and 2016) of foster parents threatens the fidelity of the state's child welfare system.

“ There is a sense of anxiety that comes over you because you have to find someone to take [the children]. —Social worker

Compromised performance and a persistent expectation gap are the effects of excessive workloads.

“ I believe that most health and welfare workers want to do a good job and are good people. I also believe that...because they are overwhelmed, they are only capable of doing an average job. I'd give them a grade of “C” if I were a teacher. But there is ample room for them to be improved. —Judge

Additional staff are likely necessary to improve workloads, but alone, adding staff will not be sufficient to address workload challenges. Workload should be addressed by examining processes, expectations, documentation, technology, and other requirements for opportunities to improve efficiency.

“ Because of resource constraints, social workers have to settle for C-grade work. The problem is that there is an expectation for A-grade results. —Chief of social work

The belief that workers cannot consistently meet requirements and quality expectations has led to a culture of compromise in which poor performance is explainable, excusable, and expected; a condition that critically undermines meaningful accountability.

Addressing complex, entrenched problems of child welfare requires a systems approach with ongoing system-level oversight.

Legislative standing committees dedicated to child welfare, children, or families have been established in many other states, any one of those states could function as a model for Idaho.

We estimate social workers are carrying on average

28–38%

more cases than what program managers, supervisors, and social workers believe social workers can carry while still serving every case effectively.

Organizational culture is undercut by a constant feeling of crisis. Social workers described a detrimental cycle of priority and compromise.

Despite collaboration and multiple forms of accountability, Idaho's child welfare system lacks system-wide accountability and oversight.



Recommendation

We recommend the formation of a formal, system-wide oversight entity with authority to ensure ongoing accountability, visibility, and accessibility for all child welfare partners and stakeholders.



View the report: www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/